

Interior Design and the Health Safety & Welfare of the Public

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Interior Design affects the Health Safety & Welfare of the public. It should be the responsibility of the qualified licensed designer to safeguard the public by providing safe access to exits from interior spaces, creating barrier-free design, and possessing knowledge of national, state and local codes and how to apply them to the spaces that are designed.

As referenced by Dr. Virginia North in her overview of interior design education, knowledge of building codes is an integral component of interior design education. In addition, the National Council for Interior Design Qualification or NCIDQ exam, tests knowledge of building codes in every section of the 6-part exam from programming to design development. Who better to provide these specific services than Interior Designers who study flame spread and materials classification?

Interior designers understand, through training, experience, and on-going education materials and their properties including flammability, toxicity, slip resistance, ergonomics, indoor air quality, lighting and acoustics. Interior designers and firefighters know that the things that burn in a fire are elements inside a building, not necessarily the building itself. Interior designers are usually responsible for specifying interior furnishings and finishes. Interior designers are trained to know the properties of materials and how best to apply them to interior spaces to comply with the codes.

Most people take for granted the elements that go into creating a safe interior environment such as lighting, slip resistant flooring and ceiling tile. They may take for granted that a well-designed space that makes them feel comfortable and able to perform tasks and function within an interior space that is also a safe environment for them. Take for instance the large open areas in shopping malls having the appropriate flooring to prevent slip and fall injuries, or another example would be appropriate lighting levels in grocery stores required to read the fine print on product labels, and yet another example would be ceiling tile with the appropriate Noise Reduction Coefficient or NRC to absorb loud noise in spaces. Most people do not realize the important responsibility that a qualified interior designer has in the selection of these applications as well as flame retardant and non-toxic fabrics and materials in interiors. Interior designers use well-planned layouts to allow building occupants of a space to exit quickly in a fire.

Interior Designers are part of the building team, and depending on the focus of a project may be leading that team, calling in the appropriate design professionals

for a project. Interior designers need to be licensed, as all the other professionals they work with, because of the impact they have on life safety issues. When a project is focused on the interior of a building like a renovation, remodel, or tenant improvement, a qualified interior designer may act as the project manager, contracting other design professionals. Collaboration is essential to meet client's needs. Professionals on the team, including the interior designer, must be highly qualified in their specific body of knowledge. Health safety & welfare must be considered throughout the development of the design as decisions are made. Due to the complexity of many projects today, with the integration of ever changing technology, no one discipline can be an expert in all aspects of a project.

It is important to make a distinction between an interior decorator and an interior designer. Interior decoration does not imply or include the entire body of knowledge which interior designers study. Decorators work only with surface decoration such as paint, fabric and furnishings. House painters may also claim the title of decorator. True, decorators and designers are concerned with aesthetics, style, and mood, however, interior designers are professionally trained and in command of skills which include the ability to apply the knowledge of flame spread ratings, toxicity, fire rating classifications, material properties, space planning for public and private facilities, building codes and standards, needs for the disabled, special needs for elderly persons, ergonomics, lighting quality and quantity, acoustics and sound transmission. Some examples of ways interior designers safeguard the public are prevention of occupational injuries and illnesses by considering employees physical requirements when designing a workspace, planning for natural lighting, and mitigating noise hazards from equipment or processes. I've already mentioned that interior designers can prevent slipping on floors by specifying the appropriate floor surfaces for the environment and complying with ADA guidelines. Provision for adequate illumination in a space may also prevent tripping and falling. Interior designers safeguard the public and provide for good indoor air quality by specifying materials and furniture that are low emitters of indoor air contaminants such as volatile organic compounds or VOC's. Interior designers can also prevent work related musculoskeletal disorders or WSMD's by specifying furniture that makes the job fit the person, selection of chairs that are ergonomic, and providing a break area so employees can leave their work area, and minimizing glare on a computer monitor screen and providing a task light.

Hopefully I've shared some information with you today that provides for a better understanding of the broad scope of work that interior designers perform and how important it is that a qualified licensed designer be involved in interiors projects to safeguard the public. I ask you to please vote "yes" on HB4311, HB4312, and HB4262.

I'm also going to share a personal experience that is affecting my professional practice. I graduated from a 4-year FIDER accredited University with a degree in

Interior Design, I have 15 years experience in commercial interior design, I have taken and passed the NCIDQ exam, and am on the Michigan State List of Qualified Interior Designers. My client, EDS, to which I am contracted to provide interior design services, has had to go outside of their contract with me because I am not able to be licensed in Michigan.

The services I provide are programming - information gathering to define client needs, space planning, interior construction documents for renovation of tenant spaces, restroom layouts, reflected ceiling plans, electrical and data plans, specification of wallcovering and wall finishes, carpet, other floor finishes, millwork - built-in cabinetry, and furniture. When it comes to implementing projects, EDS or their general contractor must obtain a permit, and have been unable to use the drawings and project documentation that I provide to them. The solution has been for EDS to hire an architect, to whom I send all the plans, drawings, layouts and project documentation. The architect then reviews the drawings, in some cases not changing anything I have done, repackages it and seals the drawings so my client, EDS, can obtain a permit to implement their project.

The way this is affecting my business is that EDS is now by-passing me as in interior designer, and giving the opportunity for work on interiors projects to an architect, stating that it is too time consuming and costly to have me provide my services and then have to turn around and send the package to an architect. I am losing business because I am not licensed. It's not the body of knowledge or the type of drawings required, but the interpretation of the building code official of a licensed design professional that's hurting me. If I were licensed, there would not be any confusion by building code officials. The projects I work on and services I provide are all interiors projects, however, I am not being allowed to practice my profession and am losing work because of it.